



Editorial

This issue of *Theology in Scotland* features three papers. Two on issues of concern to the Church today, and one on the wider aspects of evolutionary theology.

In an extended study, “The Westminster Confession: Unfinished Business”, Dr Finlay Macdonald gives an historical account of the changing status of the Westminster Confession. In the early 1970s the Church of Scotland considered a proposal to change the status of the Westminster Confession of Faith from ‘principal subordinate standard’ to that of ‘historic statement of the faith of the Reformed Church’. At the end of a period of considerable debate, the General Assembly of 1974 voted against the proposal.

The Westminster Confession had been adopted by the General Assembly of 1647 and was further ratified in 1690 in the constitutional settlement of Presbyterianism. In 1711, however, the role of the Confession was re-defined. Rather than being understood as the sum and substance of the doctrine of the Reformed church, it now became the authority by which Scripture was judged. Throughout the nineteenth century the Confession remained a matter for debate. The view that the Confession expresses the substance of the faith reappeared once again in the Church of Scotland Act of 1921.

The General Assembly of 1968 considered the place of the Westminster Confession, but once again the discussion was inconclusive. The possibility of a simple statement of faith was rejected in 1974 by the General Assembly and the effect of this was to hold up further discussion. As Dr Macdonald points out, from 1968 to 1974 a clear consensus for change had existed. These matters, therefore, remain unfinished business. In the future, the church may either accept the credal statement of 1992 or, perhaps, begin the work of compiling a new Confession for the church.

In “The Gift of an Aging Church”, Dr Eric McKimmon argues, in clear and concise terms, that secularisation is a permanent and irreversible process. Dr McKimmon, however, suggests that the decline and death of the Church may yet be providential. The various forms that the Church has taken over the ages have often proved

transitory. One of the themes of Scripture, after all, is acceptance of death. Christ accepts his own death in the light of God's will. The past teaches us that history is an open-ended process, and the eclipse of institutions is shown to be inevitable. However, life may be lived with God yet without a Church, with a cloud of unknowing between the present and the future. Dr McKimmon criticises undue concentration on the current paradigm of 'change in order to survive' and concludes with a plea for deeper pastoral care for the Church in its current situation. The Church is indeed, he insists, a transitory organisation, but a sunset may be beautiful.

The essay "Evolution and the Sacred" by Jaeho Jang was submitted for the Fraser Prize 2015 and was highly commended. It was the Panel's opinion that the essay was 'clear about [...] the benefits of enriching and sharpening the views of one tradition by setting it alongside a different one. The result is a creative and constructive thesis which shows how evolutionary science is not incompatible with religious or metaphysical thought, but can enrich their understanding. In conclusion, it shows a way forward in evolutionary theology, adding freshness to the contemporary debates between science and religion.'

In his paper, Jang explores the evolutionary theology of the American theologian John Haught in the light of a comparative study of Daoism. Drawing on Haught's idea of 'letting be' and Daoist 'spontaneity', the paper shows first that God, in creating, takes the risk of allowing the cosmos to exist in relative liberty; second, that God can still be involved in continuing evolution; and, lastly, that 'higher' categories of life and mind can emerge through evolution, according to the principles of 'information' and the 'qi' of Daoist thought.

Ian Maxwell
Editor

Theology in Scotland is now on Facebook

Like our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/theologyinscotland) to stay up to date with news about the journal and events such as the upcoming day conference on mission in Scotland (see page 40 for more details).